TL 3845

east Timor

the basic facts

Timor is the easternmost of the Nusa Tenggara group of islands in the Indonesian archipelago, and lies some 300 miles north-west of Darwin, Australia. East Timor comprises the more mountainous eastern part of the island, the enclave of Oecusse in the western part, and Atauro, a small island north of Dili, East Timor's capital and main port. West Timor is a former Dutch colony that became part of Indonesia when it gained its independence in 1945. The division of the island dates back to colonial times when Portugal and Holland fought for control of the region's spice trade. Although there are over 30 dialects, Tetum has acquired national language status among the East Timorese. Catholicism is widespread, although some old animist traditions still persist.

The colonial past Portuguese navigators arrived in Timor in the 16th century. Like the Chinese and traders from the Sunda Islands who arrived before them, the Portuguese found the island a plentiful source of sandalwood. During the next two centuries, Portuguese influence was limited to missionary activities and it was not until early in the 18th century that a seat of government was established there. Shortly afterwards, in the face of conflict over control of the sandalwood trade with the Dutch, the Portuguese withdrew to the eastern half of Timor. Until the end of the 19th century, Portuguese authority was never very strong - their control was often effectively opposed by the *liurai*, the native Timorese rulers.

A series of bloody rebellions between 1894 and 1912 and the ensuing repression eventually led to actual domination by the Portuguese. However, as the sandalwood trade declined and Portugal struggled with depression following the First World War, East Timor drifted into economic torpor and neglect, notable only for its modest production of high-quality coffee and as a distant land to which political undesirables could be exiled.

Despite Portugal's neutrality, Allied troops (Australians, Dutch and

New Zealanders) were based in East Timor during the Second World War. When Japanese forces disembarked and occupied the whole island, several hundred Australian soldiers engaged in a guerrilla war which served to divert, and thereby prevent Japanese troops from landing on the Australian coast. The operation could not have been successful without the help of the East Timorese, who paid dearly for their contribution. The Japanese razed whole villages, and looted and killed Timorese in areas where the Australians were operating. Farms in the war zones were abandoned, leading to food shortage and starvation. More than 40,000 East Timorese died as a result of the conflict, including those killed by Allied bombing raids designed to prepare the ground for the recapture of the island.

Portugal resumed control after the war despite the global trend towards decolonisation. The overwhelming feature of Portuguese rule was neglect - there were virtually no health or education facilities and few roads outside Dili. However, post-war East Timor enjoyed economic growth and relative stability, except for a swiftly put down rebellion in 1959, and the emergence in the 1960's of a small educated élite with nationalist aspirations. Colonial rule was still repressive and attracted increasing international criticism.

Civil War and the Indonesian invasion The "carnation revolution" on 25 April 1974 that overthrew the colonial-fascist regime in Portugal precipitated the formation of political parties in East Timor as the process of decolonisation began. The two most popular parties were the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) and the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN). Only the Timorese Popular Democratic Association (APODETI) - which was funded by Indonesia and never had more than 300 supporters - favoured integration with Indonesia. Both UDT and FRETILIN saw independence as their main goal and, although they envisaged different timescales, they initially formed a coalition. The coalition eventually collapsed, not so much over irreconcilable policy differences, but in the face of Portugal's weak and ambiguous stance, and a sustained campaign of destabilisation by Indonesia.

Concerned by rumours propagated by Jakarta that FRETILIN was infiltrated by communists and was planning to seize power, UDT leaders staged a coup on 11 August 1975, and took command of key installations, declaring that they wanted independence but, in addition, linkage with Portugal. Within days, countermeas-

ures by FRETILIN led to the outbreak of bitter fighting. Superior in number and better equipped, FRETILIN gained control of the colony in just over three weeks. Up to 3,000 people died during the civil war. Realising it was no longer able to enforce authority, the Portuguese administration withdrew to Atauro island in late August. FRETILIN became the *de facto* government, although it continued to recognise Portuguese sovereignty.

Although the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, gave written assurance that Indonesia had no claim on the territory and would stand by its right to self-determination, his government was actually preparing to invade East Timor. In October, the Jakarta regime intensified its military incursions from West Timor. During one such attack, Indonesian soldiers murdered five Australian journalists in Balibó. Through their intelligence networks, Western governments knew exactly what was going on and were fully aware of what was about to happen. On 28 November, in an effort to attract international support as invasion loomed, FRETILIN unilaterally declared independence and proclaimed the Democratic Republic of East Timor.

On 7 December 1975, just hours after US President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had concluded their visit to Jakarta, Indonesia launched a combined sea and air attack on East Timor's capital, Dili. Hundreds of Timorese and Chinese were indiscriminately gunned down in the streets, and many public executions were held. On 25 and 26 December, landings at Liquiça and Maubara led to further mass killings of civilians. Adam Malik later told reporters: "*50,000, or perhaps even 80,000 people may have been killed during the war in East Timor. So what? It was a war ... Why all the fuss?*" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 April 1977). As a result of these and ensuing atrocities, entire towns and villages were abandoned by people who fled in search of safety behind FRETILIN's lines. More than 500,000 Timorese were displaced in the turmoil. By April 1976 there were 32,000 Indonesian soldiers in East Timor, and a further 10,000 in West Timor. On 31 May, the Indonesian military authorities rounded up 28 people from the streets of Dili, and proclaimed them to be a "People's Assembly". This unelected body unanimously approved a petition calling for integration. On 17 July, President Suharto signed a bill integrating East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province.

War and resistance Despite their vastly superior resources, in the months that followed the invasion Indonesian forces suffered high casualties and only gained control of coastal and border areas. Counter-insurgency air-

craft, acquired by Indonesia after 1977, became the linchpin of Jakarta's encirclement and annihilation campaign. The US Government supplied the most important military aircraft (for instance, OV10-Broncos), as well as transport planes, armoured cars and a huge quantity of rifles, machine-guns and communications equipment. Indonesia also bought Sabre jets from Malaysia, Alouette helicopters from France, and trainer-fighters from Britain. The intensive bombing of mountain areas, to which the population had fled for safety, prevented the people from cultivating the land to grow food crops. In 1978 and 1979, thousands of Timorese had to leave the mountains and give themselves up to the Indonesian army. Many of them were murdered shortly after their surrender. Whole communities were forcibly split up and moved to "strategic settlements". The plight of the East Timorese was compared to the situation in Biafra during the Nigerian civil war by relief workers who were allowed to take part in a limited relief operation. 200,000 people out of an initial population of 700,000 are estimated to have died.

By 1979, Indonesia had gained control over the whole country and believed that FRETILIN and its armed wing, the FALINTIL (East Timorese National Liberation Army), had been defeated as most of their leaders had been either killed or imprisoned. In the East, however, a handful of guer rillas had survived and regrouped under the leadership of Xanana Gusmão. In 1980, resistance recommenced with smaller units fighting a classical defensive guerrilla war. Even without any external material support, the FALINTIL managed to survive the incessant military operations waged against them, and successfully forged links with people in the "strategic settlements", Dili, and other towns.

The revival of the Resistance led the Indonesian authorities in the territory to try to reach a compromise with the guerrillas. A meeting was arranged on 23 March 1983 between Xanana Gusmão, Commander in Chief of the Resistance, and Colonel Purwanto, East Timor's Indonesian Military Commander. The Timorese leader put forward a peace proposal, two conditions of which were that the territory's indigenous population should be consulted and the UN informed. The military promised to pass the proposal on to the Government. Both parties agreed to a cease-fire while a reply from Jakarta was awaited.

However, Indonesia's regime did not take the peace proposal seriously. Instead, it tried to portray the meeting as an act of surrender by the

guerrillas. This led the Resistance to break the cease-fire and resume hostilities. Indonesian military forces responded with unmitigated repression. They conscripted Timorese civilians to walk in front of advancing troops in "fence of legs" operations to flush out the guerrillas. Surveillance was stepped up, and those suspected of aiding the Resistance were treated with the utmost brutality. Often, those who surrendered were summarily executed and, on several occasions, hundreds of civilians were massacred in cold blood. There are numerous documented cases of murder, "disappearance", rape and political imprisonment.

The resettlement of 90% of the population, which aimed to break the kinship ties on which the Resistance's networks heavily depended, wreaked further havoc on East Timor's social fabric. Only 20% of the territory's village populations were not transferred. The new settlements were built far away from people's original homes, near roads or intersections, and were fenced off and guarded by troops. Restrictions on movement were so stringent that only the land around the settlements could be cultivated - the land was soon overfarmed and famine became widespread. To further aggravate the situation, thousands of Indonesian migrants were shipped in to the territory and occupied lands from which the East Timorese were driven. In all, about 100,000 Indonesian migrants have been moved in, and now control trade and transport in the territory. These moves, in conjunction with the family planning programmes (financed by the World Bank), in which the Timorese are "invited" to participate, were designed to dilute the territory's indigenous population. What is more, the civil administration system was filled with army personnel, key sectors of the economy were managed by corruption-ridden military monopolies, and Timorese were excluded from many employment opportunities.

East Timor was kept isolated from the rest of the world. The rare visits that were allowed to the territory were heavily stage-managed. The tenacity of the Timorese Resistance led to a vicious circle of escalating military repression on a genocidal scale followed by deepening popular opposition. Their failure to pacify the territory, increasing international condemnation of the situation, and the hope of attracting investors to stimulate East Timor's economy, thereby mitigating social unrest, combined to force the Indonesian authorities to ease restrictions on entry to the territory. From 1 January 1989, tourists and accredited journalists were allowed to enter East Timor.

Western powers and the UN's position On 22 December 1975, eight days after the Indonesian invasion, the UN Security Council unanimously called on "*the Government of Indonesia to withdraw without delay all its forces from the Territory.*" The resolution called on "*all States to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor as well as the inalienable right of its people to self-determination in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV)*". In defiance of the UN resolution, the Indonesian Foreign Minister denied that there were any troops in East Timor, and claimed that anti-FRETILIN forces were being supported by volunteers. Another similarly worded resolution was adopted on 22 April 1976, again by the UN Security Council. The UN's only attempt to undertake any practical intervention - when it tried to send a special envoy in February 1976 - was effectively sabotaged by Australia and Indonesia.

Each year from 1975 until 1982, the UN General Assembly adopted resolutions on East Timor, sponsored by the five former Portuguese colonies in Africa. The US abstained from voting in 1975, and from 1976 onward voted against all the resolutions. Australia, the first Western country to give de facto and then de jure recognition to Indonesia's annexation, voted for East Timor in 1975, abstained in 1976 and 1977, and has voted against ever since. With few exceptions, Western European countries have abstained. Most Western and former Eastern bloc countries have been unwilling to put their economic relations with Indonesia in jeopardy by supporting the principle of self-determination for East Timor.

In 1982, UN Resolution 37/30, adopted by 50 votes in favour and 46 against, instructed the Secretary General "*to initiate consultations with all parties directly concerned*". In spite of this clear directive, only Portugal and Indonesia have been consulted. The former UN Secretary General, (Peruvian) Javier Pérez de Cuellar, ignored demands for representatives of the East Timorese people to be consulted, and informed the General Assembly annually that the talks were continuing. In fact, the talks had reached a deadlock - Indonesia firmly refused to discuss the question of self-determination. Portugal tried to overcome the impasse by proposing that Jakarta invite a delegation of Portuguese MPs to visit the territory.

East Timor is far from lacking its own natural resources. To the North of the island lie the deep waters of the strategically important Ombai and Wetar Straits; to the South lies Timor Gap, an area of seabed between

Timor and Australia, in which huge oil reserves have been discovered. In 1978, Australia gave de jure recognition to the integration. This had been a preliminary condition to finalising an accord with Indonesia on joint oil exploration of the Timor Gap. The pragmatic approach of Australia and the US to the question of East Timor was crucial in influencing Western attitudes and contributed substantially to the UN's lack of political will. Moreover, the US actually put pressure on some countries to change the way they were voting. Such was the case of Vanuatu, the small Pacific island which was threatened with loss of aid. Meanwhile, Western nations and the World Bank have been pouring ever-increasing aid (over 5 billion US dollars by 1996) into Indonesia.

Although consistently denied permission to visit the territory, Amnesty International and Asia Watch have regularly published reports documenting human rights abuses in East Timor. The UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, composed of independent experts, has adopted several resolutions condemning the situation. Unfortunately, its parent body, the UN Commission on Human Rights, composed of representatives of governments, has lacked the political will to act on their recommendations.

The Santa Cruz massacre The partial and half-hearted lifting of the ban on entry to East Timor allowed the underground urban Resistance movement to spread and adopt new political tactics. Although the Pope's visit in October 1989 was intended to show that East Timor was no longer a security problem and that the population had accepted integration, the Papal Mass ended with a pro-independence demonstration, which made headlines in the press around the world. Two further demonstrations in January and September 1990 resulted in clashes between students and Indonesian troops. The unarmed underground Resistance movement came to play an increasingly prominent role, operating in conjunction with the armed Resistance. Such was the organisation of the underground network that Robert Domm, an Australian lawyer, succeeded in breaching Indonesian security to meet and interview Xanana Gusmão.

After 1985, the talks between Portugal and Indonesia concentrated on negotiating the terms for a visit to East Timor by a group of Portuguese MPs. Although diplomatic disagreements kept the two sides apart, a visit was finally arranged for early November 1991. The Timorese began preparing to

use the visit to express their opposition to Indonesia's occupation, and this led to heightened repression and death threats, intended to stop people from talking to the Portuguese MPs. Shortly before the delegation was to leave, the visit was indefinitely postponed, because of Indonesia's alleged objection to the inclusion of an Australian journalist.

On 12 November, after attending a mass for a pro-independence activist who had been murdered two weeks before, demonstrators marched through the streets of Dili to the Santa Cruz cemetery. Indonesian troops deliberately opened fire on the crowd and killed at least 271 people. Film and photographs of the massacre, which was witnessed by several foreign journalists, was given wide coverage and caused public outcry throughout the world.

Although the Indonesian authorities attempted to portray the killings as an isolated incident and place the blame on unemployed hooligans, Western nations condemned the massacre and brought such pressure to bear on the Indonesian Government that it took the unprecedented steps of setting up a commission of inquiry and court-martialling several military. Nevertheless, no Western nation actually altered its official position on East Timor. On 19 December 1991, Australia and Indonesia signed the final treaty on oil production in the Timor Gap. In February 1992, Britain sold a supply ship to the Indonesian Navy. Germany followed suit 1994 with 39 warships. Meanwhile, British Aerospace has been delivering Jakarta's order for 48 Hawk jets.

International outrage caused by the Santa Cruz massacre forced President Suharto to try to show "even-handedness" by putting both Timorese demonstrators and Indonesian military on trial. In reality, Timorese who peacefully demonstrated in Jakarta a week after Santa Cruz to express their solidarity with their compatriots in Timor, were sentenced to up to 10 years' imprisonment, while Indonesian soldiers who fired on an unarmed crowd received sentences of just a few months. Sentences ranging from 15 years to life-imprisonment were passed on the Timorese who were tried in Dili for allegedly organising the 12 November demonstration. The bodies of those murdered in the massacre have still not been returned to the bereaved families. In spite of official denials, East Timor became closed once again to the outside world and strict military rule was reintroduced. There were several reports of summary executions in the aftermath of the massacre.

UN talks and the capture of Xanana In the light of the Santa Cruz massacre and the UN's increasing role in resolving conflicts around

the world, it was difficult to ignore the illegality of Indonesia's annexation of East Timor. On 17 December 1992, the talks between the Governments of Portugal and Indonesia resumed in New York, under the auspices of the UN Secretary General, who was then (Egyptian) Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

However, before the New York talks got underway, Xanana Gusmão was captured by Indonesian security forces on 20 November in the outskirts of Dili. Subsequently, several members of his family and friends with whom he had been staying were also arrested. The underground networks were forced to reorganise and the Indonesian military announced that many members of the Resistance had surrendered. Xanana himself was paraded on TV in a series of "interviews" in which he renounced the struggle for independence and asserted that East Timor now constituted a part of Indonesia. This apparent change of heart was so sudden that many observers, including Bishop Ximenes Belo, felt it was the result of coercion. Despite international calls for Xanana's release, he was charged with "*rebellion, conspiracy, and attempting to set up a separate State*", and "*illegal possession of a firearm*". On 21 May 1993, after a blatantly unfair political trial, the court sentenced him to life-imprisonment. As a result of international criticism, Xanana Gusmão's sentence was later commuted to 20 years' imprisonment.

Resistance reorganises The capture of its Commander in Chief proved to be a serious setback for the Resistance. Furthermore, the wave of intense repression in the wake of the Santa Cruz massacre made 1993 a particularly adverse year for the Resistance. The underground movement was severely affected and many of its leaders were imprisoned or killed. In early April, Ma'Huno, who had substituted Xanana, was arrested in Ainaro. A new leader, Konis Santana, was chosen to take his place and command the Resistance in the territory.

After Santa Cruz, significant displays of anti-integration feeling only reappeared in mid-1994, when Timorese took to the streets in Dili to protest against the desecration of hosts by Indonesian soldiers. Late that year and throughout 1995, street protests were often on a scale never before seen in East Timor. In July that year, violence flared in Baucau, the territory's second largest city, and led to the destruction of properties owned by Indonesian emigrants and the city being temporarily taken over by a crowd of angry residents. The protests took on nation-wide proportions when, almost simultaneously, rioting broke out in Maliana and other parts of the

territory. In October and December, fierce clashes between hundreds of locals and the police broke out on the streets of Dili. Trading came to a standstill, a curfew was imposed, and troop reinforcements sent in from Jakarta. January 1996 saw new bouts of rioting in Dili's prison.

Up in the mountains, the guerrilla forces resolved to take on a political rearguard role and provide the Resistance movement nationally (i.e. throughout all sectors of the population) with strategic backup. In the words of Konis Santana, the guerrilla forces' priority was now "*to consolidate and increase support for active participation of the masses in the struggle*". The essentially military approach was abandoned once and for all, and the number of armed attacks has diminished in recent years. Although the guerrillas are presently more on the defensive than offensive, they still undertake opera-tions for the purposes of destabilisation and to seize enemy weapons. Reports of fighting are quite regularly received from the interior, and the size of Indonesia's military contingent stationed in the territory is still in the region of 20,000 men.

In mid-1993, a spectacular new tactic was introduced: a group of Timorese students entered the Finnish and Swedish Embassies in Jakarta and asked for political asylum. That was to be the start of a wave of similar initiatives carried out by hundreds of young Timorese at various Western embassies. The occupation which attracted widest media coverage, and which made almost as much impact internationally as the Santa Cruz massacre, was the one that took place on 12 November 1994, when the US President and other world leaders were gathered in Jakarta for the APEC (*Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation*) summit.

The embassy occupations thrust East Timor into the world's spotlight once again, and served to illustrate that Indonesia's repression is so intense that it is even forcing Timorese to seek exile. The final destination of most of these young Timorese asylum seekers has been Portugal. Consequently, the Lisbon Government had to overhaul its policy on Timorese refugees, with a view to ensuring their full integration with Portuguese society.

Negotiations proceed - Indonesia under pressure

From 1992 to 1996, the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia met twice a year for negotiations on East Timor, under the auspices of the UN Secretary General. Although this process did not translate into any immediate signs of progress (causing public opinion to despair at times), some

important developments were achieved. The first was the institutionalisation of negotiations, and Indonesia's acceptance of the UN's supervisory role - signifying Jakarta's recognition that it was, in fact, an international conflict. Then the scope of topics under negotiation broadened: at first, only humanitarian issues were being discussed, but from 1993, the official statements issued after the meetings revealed that substantive issues (i.e. relating to the territory's future political status) were being identified and discussed by the parties.

On the other hand, one of the Resistance's key demands - that it be allowed to fully participate in the negotiations - has still not been met. However, in compliance with agreements reached by the two parties, Minister Ali Alatas did meet officially with a Timorese delegation for the first time in October 1994 while, as from 1995, indirect participation of the Timorese in the process was formalised through the so-called intra-Timorese meetings held in Austria.

In March 1996, Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres met informally with President Suharto, during the Euro-Asian Summit in Bangkok. He told the President that the Portuguese Government would endorse the opening of interests sections for both countries on condition that Indonesia respect human rights in East Timor and release all political prisoners, including Xanana Gusmão. Jakarta has ignored the proposal.

From 1992 onward, Indonesia has been forced on to the defensive at UN bodies, especially the Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). In March 1993, Indonesia was censured by a majority vote at the UNCHR and, in March 1994, forced to accept a consensus resolution, which was a blow to its interests. In 1995 and 1996, consensus resolutions were again adopted, but were less strongly worded. Concerns about violations in East Timor led the UNCHR to send three special rapporteurs there between 1994 and 1996. Their subsequent reports were extremely critical of Jakarta and the human rights situation in the territory.

Although the complaint lodged at the International Court of Justice by Portugal against Australia over the Timor Gap accord with Indonesia resulted in an impasse, a political victory was gained. In its June 1995 ruling, the Court declared itself procedurally incompetent to consider the substance of the complaint but, indirectly, recognised the right of the Timorese to self-determination.

Since the Santa Cruz massacre, Indonesia has been put under increasing pressure by international opinion. The European Union adopted a com-

mon political position on East Timor, and multilateral co-operation with Indonesia has suffered as a result of Portugal's blocking of EU-ASEAN agreements. There has been little change to bilateral agreements, however, and most European countries maintain strong economic ties (especially arms trading) with Indonesia. The US went further than the EU: in 1993, Congress suspended the IMET programme (albeit resumed later in a different form), under which Indonesian military were provided with instruction and training in the US. In 1994, it ordered an embargo on the sale of light weapons to Indonesia, and in 1996 suspended the sale of certain types of heavy weapons. These moves, while politically correct, have rarely been of much more than symbolic value. They illustrate the limitations of principled diplomacy and the supremacy of economic interests.

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize, in October 1996, to Bishop Ximenes Belo and to José Ramos-Horta, the CNRM leader and special representative of Commander Xanana Gusmão, was one of the highest points of endorsement by the international community, and served to put the problem of East Timor back on the international agenda as a priority issue. The award demonstrates that standing up to Indonesia on the question of East Timor is no longer problematic for a body as respectable as the Nobel Committee, and proves that, after years and years of struggle, the correlation of forces in the international arena is beginning to alter in East Timor's favour. What is more, the award shows that the prospect of a negotiated settlement is not a distant mirage, but now something really tangible. By combining the humanitarian and political components, the double-headed award has put the dual nature of the problem in evidence.

What future for East Timor? It is unlikely that there will be any major changes to what has been described here. The pattern of human rights violations in the territory will certainly persist, as will resistance to Indonesian occupation, and the Timorese people's longing for freedom. New agents of change are, however, looming on the horizon. As the Indonesian regime and its President grow old, new social and political forces are emerging within Indonesian society. The fall of the dictatorship is just a question of time. Just as today the struggle of the East Timorese is a decisive factor in the fall of the regime, democratisation in Indonesia will undoubtedly help to resolve the problem of East Timor.

Quotations

"Independence is the right of all nations, and the people of Timor are no exception ... Whoever governs Timor in the future after independence may be certain that the Indonesian Government will always strive to maintain good relations, friendship and co-operation, for the benefit of both countries."

ADAM MALIK
Indonesian Foreign Minister
17 June 1974

"The United States wanted things to turn out as they did in East Timor, and worked to bring this about. The State Department wanted all measures undertaken by the United Nations to prove completely and utterly ineffective. That task was given to me, and I carried it out with considerable success."

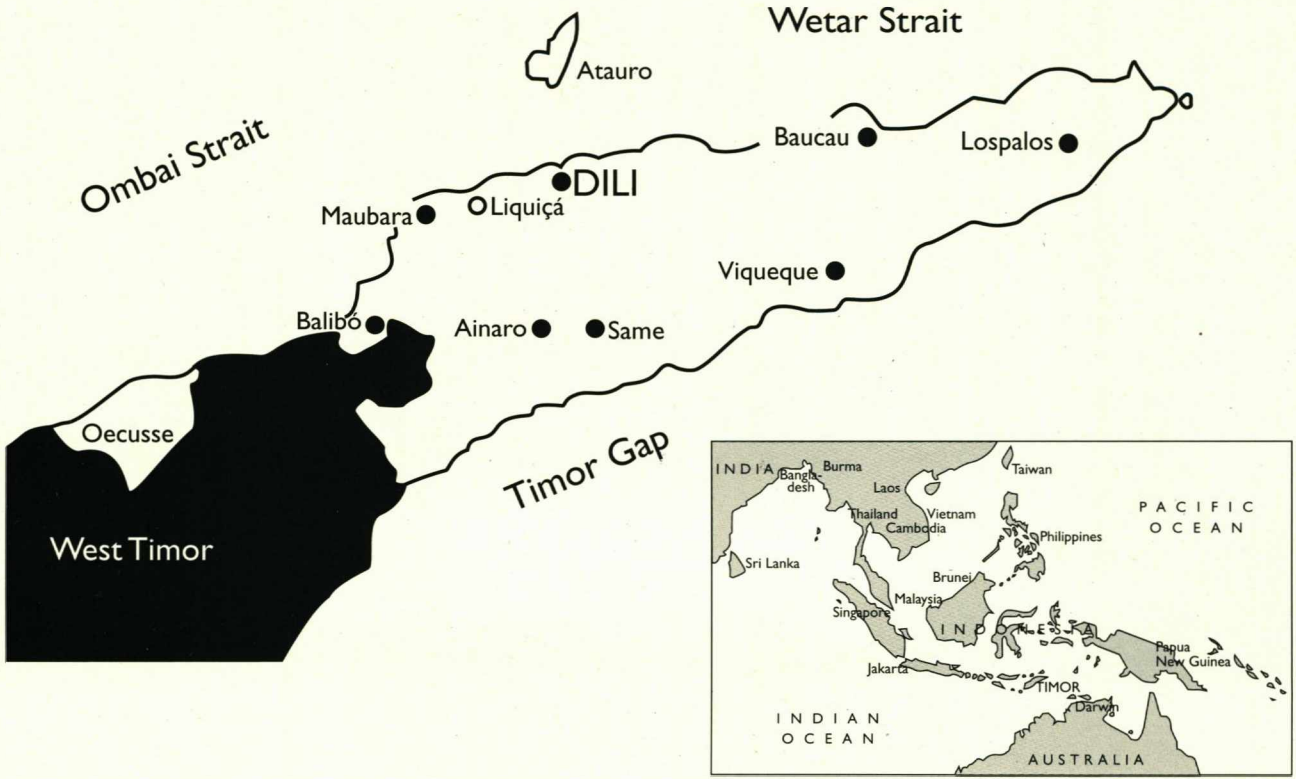
DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN
US Ambassador to the UN

"I would agree to the territory being placed under a UN administration as the first step towards seeking a final solution. I have already stated, and will repeat, that I am interested in discussing any plan for a solution under the supervision of the UN and under cease-fire conditions."

XANANA GUSMÃO
interviewed by Robert Domm
27 September 1990

"When these people are taken into detention, the first thing they do is beat them up. I have received letters from prisoners and former prisoners in which they tell me about the kinds of torture (inflicted on them) - electric shocks, burning genitals with cigarettes, immersion in barrels of freezing water, whipping - until they confessed to being FRETILIN collaborators."

Bishop XIMENES BELO
11 February 1993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Oecusse
Timor Gap
West Timor
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